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Michigan Association of
Railroad Passengers
www.marp.org

What's inside...

Production of Amtrak Airo
trains creating jobs: Page 8

Status of FRA long-distance
route study: Page 3

Manistee River bridge to be
replaced: Page 5

SHORT LINES - Page 6

Fencing railroad draws
protests: Page 3

Ann Arbor to Traverce City
and Petosky update: Page 7

MARP holds 50th year annual meeting in Durand



Guest speaker Katie Mitzner, Director of Public Affairs for Brightline, gave an upbeat and very informative talk about Brightline and its recent expansion in Florida. The chocolate cake below was especially tasty! (Corey Rowe photos).

MARP held its Annual Meeting at Durand Union Station on Saturday October 14, 2023. It was a good meeting with about 50 energized people in attendance in the big upstairs north room at the wonderful old station building. Trains were passing by on the CN mainline outside, the room was decorated for Halloween parties, lunch was being served, and everyone was feeling good.

MARP Chair John Guidinger started the meeting by recognizing the work of former MARP members Norma and John Ward to build support in the city of Durand in the 1970s that resulted in the preservation of Durand Union Station. Both are no longer with us today.

MARP received a special tribute from the Michigan Legislature. Ms. Em Lefko, Chief of Staff for Michigan State Senator Veronica Klinefelt presented MARP with a certificate in recognition of the 50 years that MARP has worked to support modern passenger trains in Michigan. The tribute lists several goals of MARP and recognizes our input to MDOT at meetings and in letters and verbal comments. In turn, members expressed their appreciation for the \$20 million for passenger rail provided recently through the efforts of Senator Klinefelt.

The featured guest speaker followed. Katie Mitzner, Director of Public Affairs at Brightline, and a native of Mason, Michigan, described the extension of Brightline, the Florida passenger rail company, from North Palm Beach to Orlando International Airport. Brightline began operating 6 daily round trips over the expanded route on September 22nd and plans to increase the frequency to 16 round trips a day. She said that Brightline West also plans a rail line between Las Vegas and the Los Angeles suburbs that is shovel ready, fully planned, and awaiting approval.

Brightline in Florida is the first new privately funded intercity passenger rail service in America in over 100 years. She said that it connects cities that are "too close to fly, and too far to drive." Brightline, which is a sister company to the Florida East Coast Railway (FECR), avoids freight train interference on the first 190 miles between Miami and Cocoa, Florida, with a new second main track along the existing FECR main that adds capacity for both freight and passenger operations.



Following her presentation, Ms. Mitzner answered many questions from the meeting attendees. All attendees received a commemorative pin from the inaugural ride to Orlando last month. Katie's presentation was very upbeat and she was perhaps the most knowledgeable public relations director to ever address MARP.

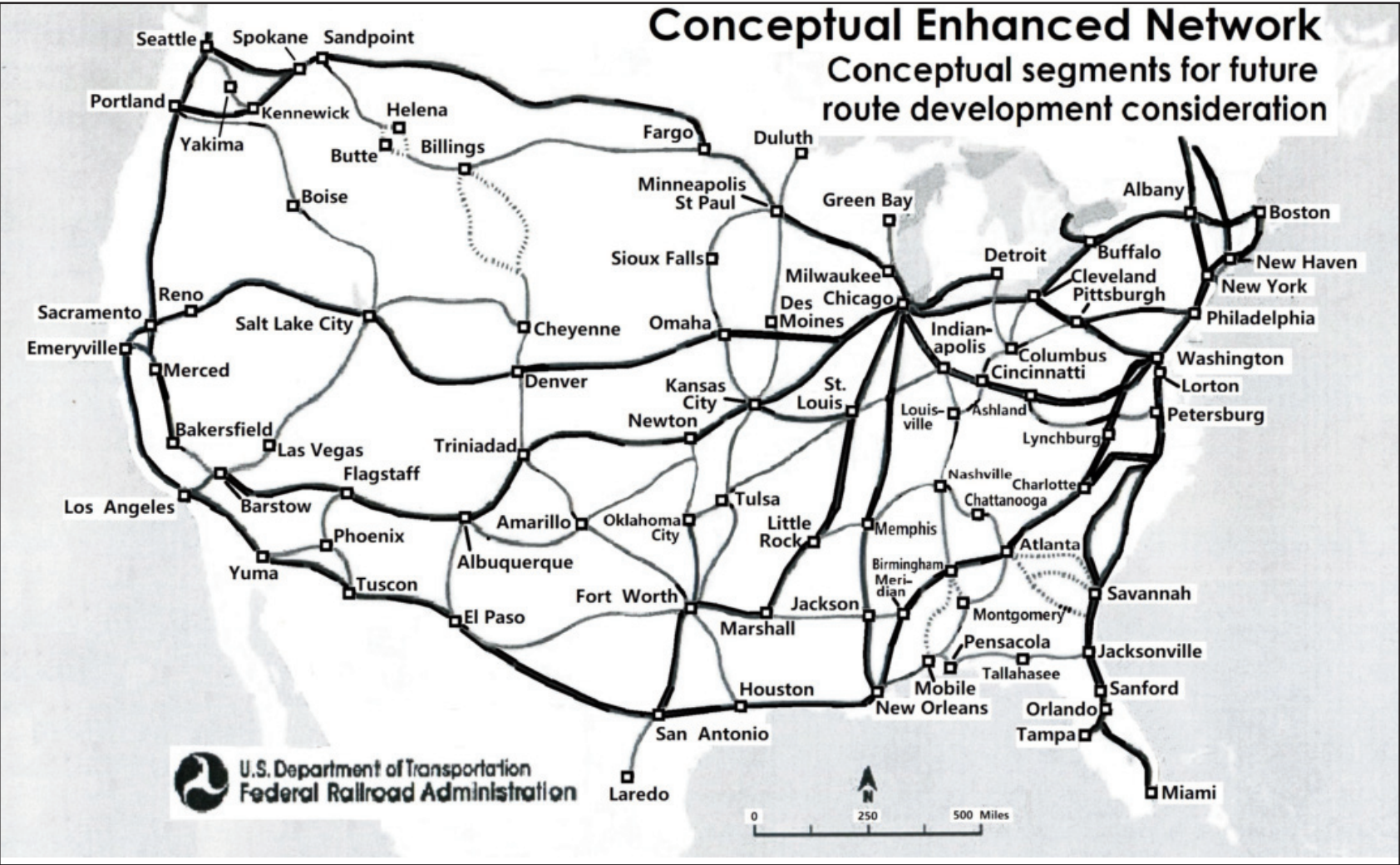
The business part of the meeting followed. Steve Vagnozzi, Government Affairs Coordinator, provided an update on legislative developments. He has met with approximately 25 legislators, focusing on those serving on the four transportation committees. The \$20 million recently added by Senator Klinefelt for passenger rail will allow for two new staff positions within MDOT's Office of Rail. MARP is pushing for one position to be dedicated to passenger rail.

See *Annual Meeting* page 3

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Status of FRA long-distance route study



The Long-Distance route study under preparation by the Federal Railroad Administration since October 2022 is the subject of an interim report summarized by *Railway Age* on August 8, 2023. The study was Congressionally mandated with the purpose of evaluating the restoration of daily long-distance intercity rail passenger service on routes previously operated by Amtrak, as well as examining the potential for new Amtrak long-distance routes. The goal is to “create a long-term vision for long-distance passenger rail service and identify capital projects and funding needed to implement that vision.” According to *Railway Age*, as of August, the study was about 50 percent complete and 6 of 11 Stakeholder Group Meetings had been conducted by the FRA.

Annual Meeting . . . from page 1

Steve reviewed other MDOT projects underway with MDOT, as well the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission (MIPRC) Annual Meeting in Illinois, and the Ann Arbor to Traverse City project, all of which are summarized in other sections of this issue of the *Michigan Passenger*.

In other news, MARP will have a table on Sunday, November 5th at the Lansing Train Show.

MARP Chair John Guidinger formally announced he will be stepping down as chairperson after this year. Nominations are open, and an election will be held next summer to select

a new chairperson who will assume the role at the annual meeting in October, 2024.

Finally, MARP Administrative Assistant, Sharon Pedersen, is leaving and Kim Springdorf of Owosso has been hired to replace her. She was introduced at the meeting.

Fencing railroad draws protests

In August MDOT began holding public meetings in Kalamazoo, Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti, and Dearborn to discuss plans to erect a 6 to 8-foot tall fence along portions of the Michigan Rail Corridor to prevent trespassing on the railroad tracks. As plans move forward to increase train speeds up to 110 mph, the fences are needed for safety. MDOT reports that nine people have been struck by trains and 27 others have been narrowly missed since 2020 between Kalamazoo and Dearborn.

Many protests in opposition to the fencing were expressed at the public meeting in Ann Arbor in mid-August. The issues were primarily related to concerns about disrupting wildlife habitat, impeding the movement of people across the tracks to access popular nearby trails and water ways, and detracting from the natural beauty of the landscape. Several people at the public meetings asked for the installation of public crossings.

According to a report in the Ann Arbor News on August 13, MDOT is not allowed to create any new at-grade crossings on the rail line for pedestrians. As for installing new overhead or underground pedestrian crossings, Peter Anastor, Manager of the MDOT Office of Rail said that these types of crossings are not within the scope of work covered by the FRA grant that is funding the fencing project.

Current plans show that the fencing will be installed in segments. In the Ann Arbor area two segments are currently proposed. The first would be 2.5 miles of fence between the Foster Road Bridge (west of Barton Pond) and east to Bandemer Park. A second segment would be for 3.0 miles between the Plymouth Road Bridge and east to Gallup Park. Additional fencing is proposed for segments of the railroad in Kalamazoo, Ypsilanti, and Dearborn.

MARP supports the effort to fence the Michigan Rail Corridor to assist in keeping pedestrians off the tracks. The fencing must be designed to minimize the effect on wildlife and aesthetic resources. Where needed, pedestrian crossings over or under the railroad should be installed on public property to allow persons to safely cross the tracks.

However, any fencing must be part of a broader public education program about the dangers of walking on high speed railroad tracks. This should include signage posted on the fence or nearby warning of the danger. Reoccurring public messages should be placed in the local print and electronic media to educate area residents of these dangers, especially as the speed of the trains increase. The public education program should also fully encompass ongoing Operation Lifesaver programs.



Presentation of a tribute from the Michigan Legislature to MARP. From left, John Guidinger, MARP Chair, Em Lefko, an aide to State Senator Veronica Klinefelt, Gloria Durocher, and John DeLora, founder of MARP. (Corey Rowe photo).

Illinois

MARP attends MIPRC meeting



Attendees at the 2023 Annual MIPRC meeting listen to an Amtrak representative describe proposed improvements at Chicago Union Station on September 18th. (MIPRC photos).

MARP Government Affairs Coordinator, Steve Vagnozzi attended the 2023 annual meeting of the Midwest Intercity Passenger Rail Committee (MIPRC), on September 18-20 in Chicago and Normal, Illinois. The meeting began Sept. 18 at Chicago Union Station where MIPRC commissioners, partners and allies were briefed by Amtrak officials on plans for the station's renovation and track/platform capacity expansion and were given an update from the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) on new Siemens-built equipment for Midwest regional service.

The Committee also toured Union Station, which included the opportunity to tour a new "Venture" club car set out for the occasion. The club cars are now being delivered and prepared for entering Midwestern regional service in 2024. Before boarding a late-afternoon

Lincoln Service train to Normal, equipped with "Venture" coaches and an Amfleet club car, attendees got a preview from IDOT officials on the improvements that enabled 110-miles per hour service in the Chicago-St. Louis corridor.

Steve says that the 110 mph trip from Joliet and Normal was extremely smooth in a Venture Business class car. The State of Illinois version of higher speed rail included concrete ties, heavy ballast, and quad gates at all crossings. It will be interesting to compare their future grade crossing incidents to Michigan's 110 mph sections.

On the morning of Sept. 19, attendees were welcomed by Normal Mayor (and Amtrak Board nominee) Chris Koos. This was followed by updates on MIPRC applications for grants from MIPRC Director Laura Kliewer, and the



MIPRC attendees receive information about the modern Amtrak station at Normal, Illinois.



MIPRC Indiana Commissioner Sharon Negele addresses the group during the 2023 Annual Meeting in Normal. At left is Illinois Commissioner Beth McCluskey, the 2024 Chair for the MIPRC.

manager of the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) Long-Distance Service Study, Francis Loetterle.

Attendees discussed presentations on:

- MIPRC's 2023 Year in Review by MIPRC Director Laura Kliewer.
- Member state DOT updates from various state DOT representatives.
- FRA's plans and programs by FRA Midwestern Division Chief Robert Buckley and FRA Project Manager Praveena Pidaparathi.
- Amtrak's long-distance service plans and priorities from Arun Rao, Amtrak Director of Network Development, and Derrick James, Amtrak manager of State & Local Relations.
- The role of consultants in passenger rail planning and development by Bob Moore, Chief Engineer at Quandel Consultants, and Charles Hoppesch, Principal Engineer for Rail Planning & Modeling at Quandel.
- Amtrak's outlook for federal funding of passenger rail in FY 2024 by Mariah Morales, Amtrak Director of

Government Affairs.

Commissioners discussed contacting Midwestern members of Congress about supporting Amtrak funding for fiscal year 2024, for either the full \$3.65 billion authorized by the Infrastructure Investment & Jobs Act, or at least the Senate's transportation bill (S.2437) proposed level of \$2.45 billion, while urging rejection of the House of Representatives' bill (H.R. 4820) proposal of just \$800 million.

Steve adds that Michigan was under-represented with commissioners at this meeting. But he did get a chance to speak with Commissioner Jason Morgan during the Chicago portion of the meeting at CUS. Morgan is a Michigan State Representative from Ann Arbor who sits on the Legislative Appropriations subcommittee on Transportation and is the House representative to MIPRC. He is definitely a passenger rail supporter and someone that Steve plans to work with in the future. (Larry Krieg adds the Justin Morgan is a good legislative representative: young, intelligent, energetic, and forward-looking.)

The CRISI grant awards announcement did not come out until the week after the meeting, and unfortunately the MIPRC application "Invest Midwest" was not chosen. Overall, the focus in this round of funding was freight rail safety and rail supply chain upgrades. Two-thirds of the awards also went to rural communities. Only a handful of passenger rail projects received awards, none of which were in the Midwest.

Laura Kliewer, Director of MIPRC, said that the 2023 meeting was informative, productive, and collaborative. She thanked those who were able to join and noted that there is an overview of the meeting on the MIPRC's website, www.miprc.org.

Blue Water Cancelled Enroute – Unhappy Adventures with Amtrak

A report from Amtrak reached MARP saying that the storms that took place on August 24th caused widespread damage that prevented Amtrak Train 364 from completing its scheduled eastbound run. Train 364 was stopped and held east of Battle Creek starting at 10:27 pm after a Canadian National freight train reported striking a tree in the night further east near MP 190 on the Flint Subdivision.

Over the next few hours, CN reported to Amtrak that the line was almost clear, but would then report that they found more damage. At 2:25 am Amtrak operations secured buses for the approxi-

mately 200 passengers on the train and at 2:47 am, Train 364 began backing up to the Battle Creek station to meet the buses. An Amtrak Road Foreman arrived at the Battle Creek Station and unlocked the station at 3:34 am. However, at 3:50 am the bus company notified Amtrak that they could not provide the buses and were cancelling.

Amtrak started looking for alternate buses. Train 364 arrived at the Battle Creek station at 4:27am. The consist stayed at the station until the new buses arrived so that the passengers on the train had access to both the station and

railcars during this time. Both the station manager and the train conductors were available to the passengers during this time. Some passengers were able to find alternate transportation on their own from the Battle Creek Station.

Four new buses were booked at 7:00 am and arrived at 9:00 am in Battle Creek. Three buses departed with the passengers destined to East Lansing at 9:55 am. One bus departed at 10:16 am with passengers destined for Durand, Flint, Lapeer, and Port Huron. Amtrak was able to provide donuts and breakfast to the passengers at the Battle Creek sta-

tion during this time.

Amtrak reports that securing buses has been a challenge for quite some time. Many bus operators reduced their fleet and had drivers leave for other employment during the pandemic and are not yet back to full strength. Amtrak continues to work with the bus companies to provide coverage for incidents like the storms in Michigan to be as responsive as possible to passenger needs.

In the following days, MARP Station Hosts at East Lansing reported receiving many complaints from passengers over this unhappy adventure.

Manistee River Bridge to be replaced



The Federal Railroad Administration announced in late September that MDOT has been awarded up to \$20 million to replace the Manistee River bridge on the state-owned line leased to the Great Lakes Central Railroad. The bridge, which is in the northeast corner of Cadillac County north of Cadillac, is on the route of the proposed Ann Arbor-Traverse City-Petoskey passenger trains. The project will help increase the load rating of the structure to 286,000-pounds. Total project estimated cost is \$34 million, with the FRA contributing \$20 million, MDOT contributing \$13 million, and GLC RR contributing \$750,000. Depending on when the grants are received, the work is estimated to begin in 2025 and be completed in 2027. (MDOT Photo)

Brightline Expands with New Service to Orlando



Celebrations at Orlando on September 23 as the first train from Miami arrives at the Orlando Airport station. (Brightline photos).



Brightline passengers arrive at the large modern station in Tampa.



The interiors of the Brightline coaches, which are built by Siemens, are very similar to the Siemens Venture cars now entering service in Michigan.

On September 22, 2023, Brightline opened its new extension to Orlando, greatly expanding its initial service. Brightline started in 2018 over approximately 65 miles of Florida East Coast Railway between downtown Miami and West Palm Beach. The new expansion extends north along the Florida coast on this railroad about 130 miles to Cocoa, which is in the Cape Canaveral area. The extension then turns to the west for about 40 miles to the Orlando International Airport. The total route length is now 235 miles. The line west of Cocoa is on new railroad built by Brightline.

The first train from Miami on the new extension arrived in Orlando at 11:05 a.m. and was greeted by more than 500 elected officials, business leaders, community partners, and company

leaders from across the state. The celebration capped one of the boldest private infrastructure initiatives in the nation. It also marks a renewal of Henry Flagler's 120-year old original vision for the Florida East Coast Railway. Brightline's expansion could reinvent passenger train travel in America.

Brightline covers the 235 miles between Miami and Orlando in 3 to 3.5 hours depending on which stations are in the schedule north of Miami. While news reports focused on the rural Orlando to Cocoa segment where the trains reach 125 mph, the Rail Passengers Association noted that far more important for passengers is the high frequency of service over the route.

On Monday, Oct. 9, Brightline nearly doubled the frequency of service

between Orlando and Miami moving from an initial 8 round trips a day to 15 trips a day. Southbound from Orlando to Miami, the trains run on a near-hourly basis beginning at 4:38 am with an 8:11 am arrival in Miami. The last departure from Orlando is at 8:54 pm arriving at 12:32 am in Miami. Northbound to Orlando, departures out of Miami begin at 6:41 am arriving at 10:19 am in Orlando and conclude at 9:41 pm arriving in Orlando at 1:19 am. This high level of frequency and the resulting service utility to passengers is what is missing in Michigan and on most Amtrak corridors.

Brightline is considering extending their service west about 80 miles from Orlando to Tampa. Last year, the company received a \$15.9 million federal grant for preliminary engineering activi-

ties and environmental approvals for the extension. There is at present no public timeline for breaking ground on the project.

The first northbound train carried guests who joined Brightline's Founder Wes Edens, CEO Mike Reininger and President Patrick Goddard. On the train's arrival, Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer greeted guests on the platform and presented the Key to the City to Edens who was joined by Reininger, Goddard and other Brightline representatives. Officials from the Federal Railroad Administration, the Florida Department of Transportation, Greater Orlando Aviation Authority, Central Florida Expressway Authority, and others, were present to greet the first train.

Amtrak partners with Texas Central on proposed Houston-Dallas speed line



An artist’s vision of the future in Texas. Amtrak disclosed in August that since 2016 it has been communicating with Texas Central and is now assuming a larger role in this venture. (Texas Central drawing)

On August 9, Amtrak and Texas Central announced that they are jointly exploring the viability of reviving and advancing the Dallas-Houston 205-mph high-speed rail project. This ambitious project was first proposed several years ago by Texas Central as an entirely new railroad for true high speed rail on a for-profit basis. The project has been stalled for several years due to difficulties involving funding, right-of-way acquisition, and political opposition.

An interesting disclosure by Amtrak on August 9th was that Amtrak has cooperated with Texas Central on various initiatives since 2016, primarily in the form of agreements to provide through-ticketing using the Amtrak reservation system and other support services for the planned high-speed rail line. The involvement of Amtrak at a much more prominent position in this project is especially encouraging.

MARP believes that true high speed rail, such as exists in other parts of the world, will probably always require the construction of new railroads designed specifically for high speed passenger service, such as is the new railroad being built in California. Our existing railroads, almost all of which were laid out in the nineteenth century, have curves that are too sharp for high speed. (The same curve limitation also affects highway medians, which many people have often suggested as routes for high speed trains.)

Andy Byford, the newly hired Amtrak Senior Vice President of High-Speed Rail Development, is leading this new initiative. Byford joined Amtrak in April 2023 and began developing a team focused on high-speed opportunities. MARP agrees with him when he says that many of the country’s biggest and fastest-growing metropolitan areas, like Houston and Dallas, deserve more high quality high-speed, intercity rail service. We hope that he and Amtrak can bring their passenger experience to this project and explore opportunities with Texas Central.

The proposed 240-mile route would have true high speed service with a total travel time of less than 90 minutes between two of the top five major U.S. metropolitan areas. The project would initiate the first new passenger rail corridor service in the south central region of the US.

Texas Central and Amtrak have submitted applications to several federal programs to support further study and design work for Dallas to Houston. Texas Central CEO Michael Bui said that the train would use advanced, proven Shinkansen technology to revolutionize rail travel in the southern U.S. He indicated that Amtrak could be the perfect partner to help achieve this goal. The completed project is estimated to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by over 100,000 tons per year, saving 65 million gallons of fuel, while removing 12,500 cars per day from Interstate Highway 45. In addition, the high-speed rail line would bring significant economic benefits to the region, including thousands of well-paying construction jobs and long-term, skilled operations and maintenance jobs.

SHORT LINES



Still photo from lead Amtrak locomotive camera showing horizontally misaligned track seconds before the derailment of the Empire Builder at 78 mph near Buelow, Montana, on September 25, 2021. The derailment resulted in three fatalities and 49 injuries. (NSTB photo)

On August 9 Amtrak indicated that they have submitted grant applications for operating a daily *Sunset Limited* service. Also proposed is a branch off the *Crescent* at Meridian that would operate from Mississippi through Louisiana and Texas. Amtrak also stated that it supports Kansas DOT’s *Heartland Flyer* Corridor ID application that will connect Wichita and communities across Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas to the Amtrak network. Amtrak also supports Texas DOT’s applications for the Texas Triangle (Dallas-Fort Worth-Houston-San Antonio) routes.....On August 7, 2023 the Sierra Club released a highly favorable statement on passenger rail outlining a series of recommendations to improve both passenger and freight rail, and called for expanding rail electrification. They say that investing in rail will help create good jobs, provide equitable mobility, reduce traffic congestion, and cut climate emissions. Nationwide, road transportation is responsible for 82 percent of transportation greenhouse gas emissions, while rail is responsible for 2 percent. The Sierra Club says that electrifying railroads will further reduce these emissions and more than triple their energy efficiency. Electrifying trains is imperative to advancing environmental justice and improving air quality for communities across the nation.....Year to date ridership on Vermont’s two Amtrak trains greatly increased according to TrainsoftheValley.org. and a blog by Carl Fowler. The Vermonter ridership was up 119% and the Ethan Allen patronage was up 140% over 2022 numbers. Total YTD riders on both routes combined were at a record 122,700. These increases reflect the recent extension of the Ethan Allen from Rutland to Burlington and may also be influenced by the termination next door in New York State of the Adirondack north of Albany due to Canadian National’s rail heat restrictions in Canada.....Sliding bluffs continue to threaten the Amtrak line through Del Mar and San Clemente, California, to the extent that discussions of moving the track further inland are becoming more common. The *Los Angeles Times* reported in July that elected and transportation officials do not want to risk rail passenger and freight movement from an active landslide that has not finished moving. San Diego is now a little more motivated to support moving the route inland with underground tunnels. At present, Orange County transit folks are searching for solutions to the problem, chief among them is track relocation. However, the preliminary estimated cost of doing so is around \$3 billion and would not be completed until 2035. The track sees many passenger trains and a billion dollars’ worth of freight every year.....The long sought New York-Scranton Amtrak service was promoted as Congressmen from New Jersey and Pennsylvania toured the construction site of a new station in Andover, New Jersey. This station is being built as part of a plan to restore commuter rail service to Sussex County, NJ. This is also part of a larger plan to someday return intercity rail service between New York and Scranton. New track would be needed to be re-laid through New Jersey and across the Delaware Water Gap. The Scranton-NYC route was submitted for new corridor identification, and the Federal Railroad Administration is expected to decide late this fall. A consultant’s report envisioned an optimistic 2028 start for the service with three round trips a day on the 180-mile route serving seven stations, four of them in New Jersey, including Andover.....Poor Track Conditions led to the September 25, 2021, derailment of the Empire Builder on a slight curve near Buelow, Montana, according to a National Transportation Safety Board report. Summarized in *Railway Age* on July of 2023, the report said that a combination of worn rail, vertical track deflection at several four-bolt rail joints, track misalignment, and subgrade

issues led to the derailment. Because of the wear on the rail, the wheel flanges were riding on top of at least one joint bar, which during high speed at the slight curve in the track, resulted in wheel climb. The NTSB also found that the north rail joint had a vertical deflection of 2 inches (rail above the tie plate) at the derailment curve and the south rail 1-1/8 inches. The track was also misaligned 2 to 4 inches to the inside of the curve apparently from poor subgrade conditions. A still frame from the camera in the lead locomotive shows the misaligned track seconds before the derailment (see accompanying photo). Records made by cameras in three trains passing through the curve a few hours earlier show progressive movement of the curved track during that day. BNSF immediately rebuilt the track in the curve and replaced both rails with continuous welded rail, which eliminated the rail joints.....Construction has started at the Milwaukee Airport Amtrak Station for a second rail platform with an overhead catwalk between the two boarding platforms, according to the Wisconsin Association of Railroad Passengers. This is part of the Hiawatha expansion process, which will eventually allow the Hiawatha Service to increase from seven to 10 trains a day. This is one of three projects required by Canadian Pacific (CPKC) to allow 10 Hiawatha trains per day on their track and a second train to St. Paul, Minnesota. The other two projects are installation of a freight bypass track through the Muskego Yard in Milwaukee for freight trains to bypass the Milwaukee station, and signal improvements on the CPKC mainline west of Milwaukee.....Amtrak public survey findings showed very strong support for passenger rail investments. Conducted by the Mellman Group for Amtrak, the survey published on August 7 shows very high support for passenger rail across geographic location, age, race, and gender. Survey highlights include: 92% say it is important for the United States to invest in passenger rail safety and service improvements; 86% believe in the importance of a strong American passenger rail system; 83% support passenger rail investments identified by Congress in the Infrastructure Investment & Jobs Act; and 81% want their state to invest in bringing more passenger rail service to their local area. The 2023 survey was conducted by the Mellman Group and surveyed 1,000 registered U.S. voters.....After nine years and millions of dollars in federal, state, and private investment, Grenada Railroad on August 29 celebrated the complete restoration of its 235-mile line between Canton, Mississippi, and Memphis, Tennessee. *Railway Age* reported in August that Grenada Railroad was near abandonment in 2014 when 90 miles of track between Grenada and Canton fell into disrepair. State and local officials saved the railroad and federal officials provided grants, to help fund the project. A 2017 FASTLANE grant was used to help reopen 81 miles of abandoned track and the Canton interchange. A 2020 \$6.2 million CRISI grant was used to help repair 90 miles of track and 36 bridges from Grenada to Southaven in 2022 to achieve a 286K GWR certification. The remaining work in 2023 was non-track-related, including a locomotive inspection pit and a building. Grenada offers daily access for local freight customers to all Class 1 railroads.....The National Association of Realtors (NAR) says a new survey shows a clear desire by home buyers for walkable communities in cities and suburbs across the country. An article in the Munster, Indiana, *Times*, picked up by *Mass Transit* online on Aug. 8, 2023, says that Americans living in walkable communities report a higher quality of life. 79% said being within an easy walk of other places and things, such as shops and parks, is very or somewhat important. 78% of those indicated that they would be willing to pay more for a dwelling in a walkable community. 65% said having public transport nearby is very or somewhat important. 56% said they would accept a house with a small yard and be able to walk to places. 53% would prefer an attached dwelling (own or rent a townhouse/condo/apartment) and be able to walk to shops, restaurants, and have a short commute to work. The biannual NAR Community & Transportation Preferences Survey polls residents in the 50 largest metropolitan areas of the United States.....The proposed US House budget would cause a funding crisis for Amtrak according to rail passenger supporters. On July 12, the House Appropriations Committee’s Transportation Subcommittee approved its FY 24 appropriations bill, which would provide only \$875 million for Amtrak, a 64% decrease from FY 23 (\$2.453 billion). Funding at this level will affect service throughout America, from small and rural communities to major cities. Amtrak requested \$3.650 billion for FY 24, the full authorized level. Of this amount, \$2.622 billion is necessary to meet basic needs: operating trains, maintaining the railroad, addressing day-to-day requirements, and making a limited number of high-priority, high-impact strategic investments for the future. This amount in the House bill would fail to meet the minimum level Amtrak needs to operate its trains.

MARP attends meeting in Toledo with Ohio Rep. Kaptur



The Toledo meeting on September 22, 2023, called by US Representative Marcy Kaptur in Toledo to advance rail passenger issues in Ohio was positive and informing. From left: Eddie Hall, President, Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen, Norfolk Southern AVP David Lehlbach, FRA Administrator Amit Bose, Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur, Kaptur aide Austin Serna, and (in foreground) Amtrak CEO Stephen Gardner.

MARP Chair John Guidinger attended the meeting on September 22, 2023, called by US Representative Marcy Kaptur (D-Toledo) to advance passenger rail service in Ohio. Rep. Kaptur is a strong supporter of rail passenger a good friend of our own US Rep. Debbie Dingle (D-Dearborn). Their congressional districts are within a few miles of each other across the Ohio-Michigan border.

John was one of about 40 people attending the two hour meeting at Toledo's Union Station. Other attendees included Rep Kaptur, Amtrak President Stephen Gardner, FRA Administrator Amit Bose, RPA CEO Jim Mathews, and mid-level managers from Norfolk Southern, Canadian National,

and CSX. Also attending were the heads of several Ohio regional planning agencies including those of the Toledo Area and the Cleveland Area, and representatives from the Lakeshore Rail Alliance and All Aboard Ohio. John thought that it was good to see rail labor represented at the meeting as well. He came away from the meeting feeling very positive.

Although Rep Kaptur had the attendees answer nine questions in writing before the meeting, John spoke for about 4 minutes on only one topic. That was the need to get the "South of the Lake Study" restarted and concluded so that a route into Chicago from the east can be identified for future improvements to reduce the number of

late trains in Michigan. Even new trains proposed for Ohio will need to have reliable connections with trains to and from Chicago. John pointed out that South of the Lake is very peripheral to the transportation needs in Indiana and Illinois and not within Michigan at all. So, this study must be managed by an agency such as the FRA or a multistate rail commission.

He also said that many people knowledgeable of the study considered the Norfolk Southern route, which Amtrak presently uses, as the best option for intercity passenger rail access into Chicago from the east. Several attendees were surprised to hear Mr. Bose say that work has started on planning for this route by the FRA and the Midwest Intercity Rail Commission, which involves 12 States. Perhaps the FRA has moved on to accepting the NS route and the South of the Lake Study does not need to be completed. (We also learned that Ohio has pulled out of the commission and we pressed Rep Kaptur and others to get Ohio to rejoin.)

John found that despite concerns of no action, the FRA has actually received many applications for new corridors under the national BIL legislation. (We think of "corridors" as routes with many trains running on them. But they apparently think of the word "corridor" as a "route.") Mr. Boise said that the FRA is moving to respond to these applications and we will see some action in a few months.

After the meeting John talked to Mr. Bose and suggested that the FRA website list the names of the applications that they have received to help us advocates feel more positive. We are becoming a little despondent from an apparent lack of action and we worry that the next president may shut it all down with nothing built. He seemed to understand and hinted that he would take action to list the applications received. He said that they had to add staff to handle the new tasks handed to them from the BIL legislation. He spoke forcefully during the meeting about how disappointed he was when he saw so many earlier passenger rail projects get

cancelled in years past.

Amtrak President Stephen Gardner spoke for several minutes on the need to expand Amtrak. He said that Amtrak has been involved in meetings with Via Rail Canada and others about the often mentioned Chicago-Detroit-Toronto service. He noted that Amtrak ridership and revenues have bounced back to recover completely from the effects of the pandemic and that revenues now cover 100 percent of the above the rail costs. He said that everywhere he goes he sees strong support for expansion of passenger rail services. He mentioned the very positive growth in Virginia and North Carolina and that he thought that Ohio is starting to come around to be more interested. He was out-going and amicable, and we were able to talk to him very easily.

John talked after the meeting to David Lehlbach, VP for Strategic Planning, who is in Norfolk Southern's Atlanta office. He told him that MARP has observed some very talented dispatching of passenger trains around freight trains east of Chicago lately. MARP thought NS was trying to get the passenger trains through and minimize delay. Mr. Lehlbach agreed that NS needs more dispatching tools in their toolbox such as more crossovers. John mentioned perhaps another one or two mainline tracks in certain segments west of Porter would also be helpful.

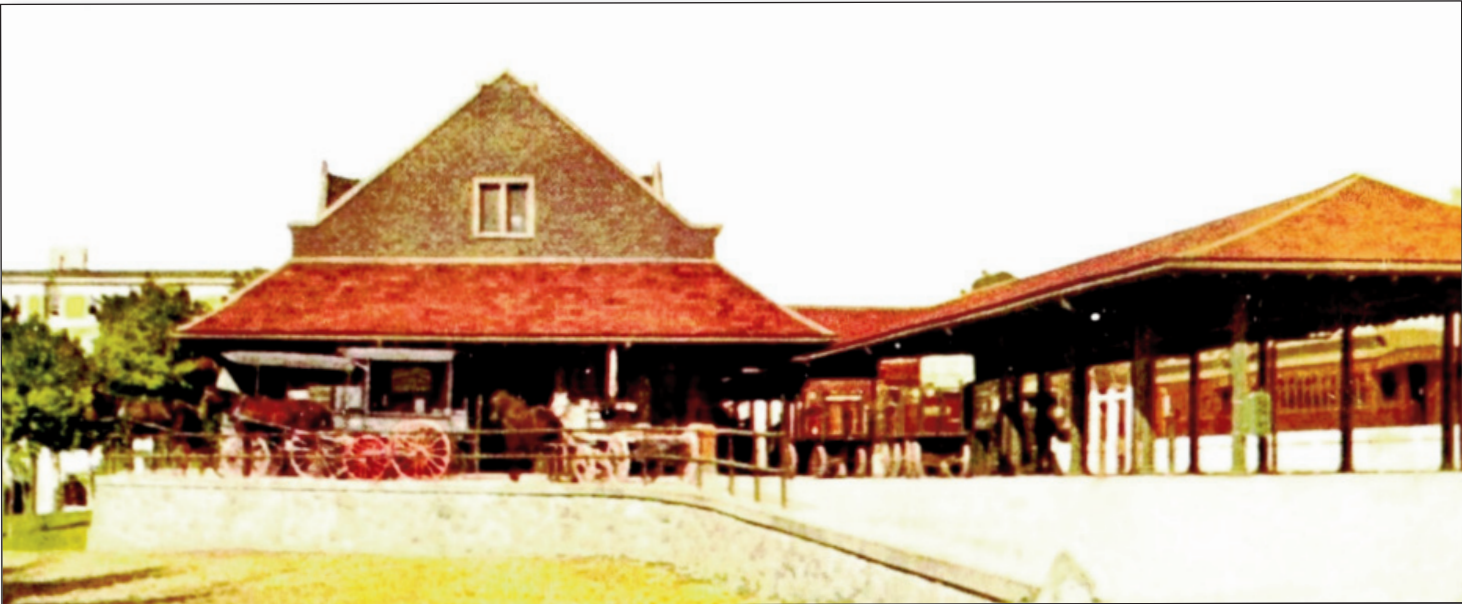
Mr Lehlbach said that NS needs to be involved early in passenger rail proposals that are on their system. He said that at present NS dispatches 88 passenger trains a day on NS tracks, which consist of about 40 Amtrak trains, 40 commuter trains, and other trains on Conrail Shared Assets, which they own jointly with CSX.

After the meeting John suggested to Rep Kaptur that she needs to help get Ohio into rail passenger projects. For 50 years we in Michigan have looked upon Ohio as not interested. Badly needed rail routes from Michigan to Ohio cities were not taken seriously by the Ohio government.

So, overall, a great meeting.

Ann Arbor to Traverse City and Petoskey Update

The former GR&I (PRR) Depot in downtown Petoskey, shown here about 1910, remains carefully preserved as an office building. The Great Lakes Central Railroad tracks terminate a few hundred feet south of the building, but could be replaced to serve the depot platform once again for passenger trains from Ann Arbor and Detroit. Petoskey is a wonderful, walkable community, with shops, restaurants, and lodging near the depot, the perfect place for visitors to relax from the busy cities of Southern Michigan.



By Steve Vagnozzi

The northern Michigan passenger rail project was recently awarded state and federal funding to move forward with a Phase II study and begin a Service Development Plan. The Cadillac/Wexford Transit Authority is the agency that is responsible for the grants and they are working with the Groundwork Center and other partners to complete the study. In September,

the project partners were finally able to get approval from the US Department of Transportation to move forward and will soon begin their search for a consulting firm to complete the technical parts of the study and plan.

The planning study should take about a year and half to complete and will identify and prioritize the upgrades needed along the rail corridor to maximize freight and passenger opportunities, which could include crossing sig-

nal and track improvements, safety technology, potential bridge replacements, capacity improvements, and equipment needed. This phase will also include developing the business plan for passenger service, which includes updating the project's market and ridership forecasts, station locations, and operating schedule.

MARP and others are excited that MDOT was awarded a \$20 million federal grant to replace the railroad bridge

over the Manistee River. That project will greatly enhance freight and future passenger service in northern Michigan.

Groundwork and the Village of Kalkaska applied on behalf of the Northern Michigan Passenger Rail Project to the Federal Railroad Administration's Corridor ID program. We expect to hear about that award in November.

Production of Amtrak Airo trains creating jobs



Amtrak’s new Airo Train-sets, shown above and in photo below, will be capable of traveling up to 125 miles per hour. Beginning in 2026 they will be assigned initially to the Cascade route in Oregon and Washington and then to most eastern short distance routes. (Amtrak Photos).

Amtrak’s funding under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) will support the procurement of Amtrak Airo trainsets, while meeting the job creation goals of the IIJA Act, according to *Railway Age* on October 13 and Amtrak Press releases. The Amtrak order for the new (5- to 8-car?) train sets will benefit communities across the country through the creation of new, sustainable, engineering and manufacturing jobs. Over 3,500 parts will be manufactured by nearly 100 suppliers in 31 states to comply with the FRA Buy America standards. “As we build to support the soaring demand for train travel, Amtrak Airo is creating jobs even before the trains are on the tracks,” said Amtrak President Roger Harris. “The new trains will not only provide world-class accommodations on routes throughout the country, but will stimulate local economies as we revolutionize the Amtrak experience.”

In 2021, Amtrak selected Siemens Mobility to manufacture the new rolling stock. Earlier this year, Amtrak

executed a contract option for 10 additional trains, bringing the total order to 83 sets. Production has started on the new trains at Siemens’s Sacramento, California, facility, which has become one of the largest and most sustainable manufacturing plants of its kind where solar panels provide most of its electrical power. The new trains can operate at speeds of up to 125 mph and will avoid time-consuming locomotive changes. (Although not stated, apparently the new Airo trains will be low emission Diesel-powered and operate as such on the Northeast Corridor, therefore eliminating the need to switch between electric and Diesel locomotives where corridor trains operate off corridor.)

According to Amtrak, the new trains will “elevate the journey with spacious interiors, panoramic windows, plenty of legroom, double and single seats, dedicated outlets, USB ports, and onboard Wi-Fi.” The trains, Amtrak adds, “will also offer greater accessibility with onboard passenger lifts, increased accessible spaces,



and enhanced audible and visual messaging that will improve the experience for all customers.

The first Amtrak Airo trains are scheduled to debut in 2026 on the Cascades Route in Washington and Oregon. The Airo equipment will replace the older cars brought in for temporary use after most of the

Talgo equipment was removed following the 2020 derailment, in which the Talgo equipment did not perform well. They will also be used on short distance routes in the eastern US including: the Northeast Corridor Regionals, Empire Corridor Service, Virginia Service, Keystone Service, Downeaster, Maple

Leaf, New Haven-Springfield-Greenfield Service, Palmetto, Carolinian, Pennsylvanian, Vermonter, Ethan Allen, and Adirondack. The Midwest trains in Michigan will continue with the new Siemens Venture cars and Charger locomotives.

MDOT Office of Rail Project Update

Steve Vagnozzi offers the following update as of October 2023 on projects under construction or planned by the Michigan DOT Office of Rail:

- *Jackson/Mechanic Street Bridge Work and Amtrak Track Work:* Construction is anticipated to finish mid-November. This was funded in part by a 2018 State of Good Repair Grant. (State of Good Repair Grant funds are available through the Federal Transit Administration for capital projects to maintain fixed guideway or high-intensity motorbus systems in a state of good repair, including projects to replace, rebuild, maintain, and rehabilitate.)
- *Battle Creek Bypass:* This project involves engineering and environmental work to eventually separate passenger and freight trains on 1.8 miles

of Canadian National track through downtown Battle Creek. The work is being conducted with a consultant and is funded in part by a 2019 CRISI grant. (Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements grants are from the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) for projects that improve the safety, efficiency, and reliability of intercity passenger and freight rail systems.)

- *Track and Signal Work in the Michigan Corridor:* Construction began in 2023 to rehab the signal and switch components at all control points and replace ten freight customer turnouts and 26 grade crossing gate mechanisms along the Michigan Line. The project is funded in part by a 2019 State of Good Repair grant.

- *Jackson - Ypsilanti Curve Modifications:* Construction has started this year to increase speeds by reducing the severity of several curves on the segment of MDOT-owned track between Jackson and Ypsilanti. The project is apparently ahead of schedule and additional curve modifications will be completed this year. This project is being funded in part by a 2020 State of Good Repair grant.
- *Fencing to Control Trespassing:* This project will install fencing at selected communities along the Michigan Corridor where trespassing is a problem. MDOT is meeting with local municipalities and the public, and fence designs are being reviewed. The work is being funded in part by a 2020 CRISI grant.
- *Detroit New Center*

Intermodal Facility: MDOT continues to work on engineering and environmental tasks, with a current focus on responding to stakeholder feedback. Construction is currently anticipated to start in 2026. This work is being funded by a 2021 RAISE grant. (Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity grants are from the US DOT for road, rail, transit, and port projects. They were previously known as BUILD and TIGER grants.)

- *Accelerated Rail Bridge Reconstruction:* MDOT has requested Pre-Award Authority apparently for rail bridge reconstruction project(s). This work would be funded in part by a 2021 State of Good Repair Grant. (Pre-Award costs are those incurred after

the award is announced but before the grant is obligated. All Pre-Award costs are incurred at a project sponsor’s risk.)

- *Replacement of the Manistee River Railroad Bridge:* This grant award was announced on October 4, 2023 and will provide \$20.4 million to MDOT to replace the Manistee River Railroad Bridge on track owned by MDOT and operated by the Great Lakes Central Railroad. This work will be funded in part by a 2022 CRISI Grant.

Other applications for funding passenger rail projects in Michigan are pending or the grant applications are in preparation.